

## **Moving Forward With The West Valley City Police Department**

Mayor Mike Winder

Remarks delivered April 23, 2013

As the revelations of problems with our Neighborhood Narcotics Unit have come to our attention and that of the public I think we are all very shocked, disappointed, and frustrated. Our city is undergoing major steps to help identify what went wrong, correct it, and make sure that such behaviors do not happen again.

I stand here today with Acting Police Chief Anita Schwemmer. She has stepped up to lead at a very difficult time and has put in untold hours in the recent weeks with tremendous professionalism. I thank her and her fellow officers who continue to serve and to protect. I also stand here with our city manager, Wayne Pyle. It is important to remember that in our city's council-manager form of government, the police chief and all department heads report to the city manager, who in turn reports to me and the City Council. Consequently, Mr. Pyle has played a critical role in helping us deal with the challenges we face today inside the West Valley City Police Department.

There are five key steps to get our police department back on track, and I want to take some time today to highlight what these are and where we are in the process:

- 1- **We must identify and root out any and all impropriety.** I am pleased at the aggressiveness of our city's internal investigation. It was this investigation that identified the specific problems that we need to address. I welcome the FBI's independent investigation to make sure that our team did not miss anything. I appreciate the District Attorney's office looking closely at all of the cases involved. Between all of these investigations all shortcomings will be made known, and we will act on them. In the meantime, just last week we placed the entire Neighborhood Narcotics Unit on administrative leave until these issues are sorted out. Individuals will be held accountable for improper actions. Any necessary corrective action will be taken.
- 2- **We need stronger independent oversight.** West Valley City has one of Utah's only two independent citizen's Professional Standards Review Boards, and it has done great work through the years. But it needs to be empowered as a stronger and more transparent board. Today our City Council is instructing the staff to put in additional guidelines to improve this police review board. We are incorporating best practices from cities around the nation to ensure that we have rigorous training, clear policies, and published reports.
- 3- **We must exhibit the humility to learn from others and improve.** To this end, we announced Friday that we have commissioned a Special Review Panel made up of a former district attorney, a retired judge, and legal and police expertise to review each case that has been dismissed by the Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office. We have asked them to provide us with their

expert opinions on what we can learn from these cases. Today, I am also pleased to announce that as city leaders we are working on the creation of a Police and Public Safety Advancement Task Force, which will be charged with examining potential partnerships and collaborations with other law enforcement agencies, and to seek best practices. Details of this task force will be put together in the weeks ahead. Public safety leaders from around the state have reached out with their willingness to help, and conversations with them will continue. We appreciate the many resources and options offered.

- 4- **We will have new police department leadership.** It is critical that we have leadership at the top of our department that views with seriousness any breach of protocol; that has a firm handle on what is going on in the department, and that can quickly correct anything that is out of line. To this end we are currently underway with a nationwide search for a new police chief. This important job has been posted for nearly a month and has already generated great interest from around the state and the country. We intend to continue gathering resumes of outstanding law enforcement leaders through the end of May. We encourage anyone with interest and the qualifications to apply. From this competitive pool, a rigorous selection process will winnow the list, vet top candidates, and review the finalists. Ultimately, a new police chief will be chosen and be sworn in this summer. This leader will help us set a new tone in the West Valley City Police Department, and I am confident our best days are ahead.
- 5- **We must remember the big picture.** Despite the difficult headlines and probing investigations, it is important to remember that the cases being dismissed are related to a single unit, a handful of officers, and that the remaining 180 members of our police department continue to be engaged in top notch police work day in and day out. This is the team that is helping to reduce crime in our city. The total number of violent and property crimes combined was 11% lower last year than four years ago before I took office as mayor, yet our city population has continued to grow in that time. Police calls at Valley Fair Mall are down 75% in that time period, even though traffic there is up dramatically. We hate to see even one case dismissed. Ever. But let us remember that this team sees several thousand cases successfully prosecuted each year, and that this year will be no exception.

West Valley City will not stand down, but we will stand tall. This city has had its share of challenges through the years and each time we have worked through them. We do not like the situation we are in today, of course, but we are working hard in so many ways to get through it.

Our residents can have confidence that their city leadership is doing everything they can. With federal, district, and internal investigations we can be assured that no other police department in the state will have been as thoroughly scrutinized this year. With the changes we are making to our Professional Standards Review Board we will soon have the finest independent citizens review committee in the Mountain West. With the resources of neighboring agencies, a special review panel, a best practices task force, and a new police chief, I am confident that we can serve the residents, businesses, and visitors to our city better than ever.

I'd like to open it up now to any questions.